ASHTON HALL:

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

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ASHTON HALL.

CANTO I.

TWILIGHT.

No legend this of bygone age,
That faintly gleams in History's page;
Of far-off lands, or sunny skies,
The cynosure of poet's eyes,
Where time and distance cast the spell
That in their twilight loves to dwell,
And each harsh hue their succour lend,
In roseate harmony to blend.

I sing not of heroic deed,
Of knightly valour or its meed;
Of dames and damsels, such as throng
The wizard Ariosto's song.

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I claim, alas! no sacred trance,
Wafted from regions of romance;
Too feeble is my harp to gain
A sound of that enrapturing strain
Which Caledonia's bard could give,
Bidding the shadowy past to live.
Mine is a tale of lowlier parts,
A tale of English homes and hearts,
Such as, in this our dreamless day,
May still invite the poet's lay,
So I could catch one passing beam
To lend its radiance to my theme.

Yes! though the demon hand of gain
Hath widely left its withering stain;
Though love of luxury and change
The mansion from its lord estrange;
Though sated fancy lead to roam,
And scorn the sacred name of home—
Yet are there left who fondly cling
To joys which rural scenes can bring;
Still high-born men, who love their fields,
And such delights as nature yields,—
Hardy, refined, in court or camp,

Bearing of cultured mind the stamp;
Whilst science, art, or learning's page
In stiller hours their thoughts engage.
Matrons there are, to whom the world
Its proudest banner hath unfurled,
Whose eyes, undazzled, homeward turn,
And there a purer ray discern;
Maidens, who in their first delight,
When all is new and fair and bright,
Still, all these cherished joys above,
Home and its Christian labours love,—
The old to cheer, the young to lead,
The sick to tend, the poor to feed:
In this they find a truer zest,
By blessing others to be blest.

Yes! home hath still a magic charm
To lead to God, and save from harm;
Like beacon-light or guiding star,
That shines to wanderers from afar.
What land with England e'er could vie
In holy matron dignity?
Where else in maidens shall we trace
Such artless, bright, yet modest grace?

'Twas eventide in summer's prime—
The glory of our English clime,—
In quaint relief the shadows fall
From porch and quoin in Ashton Hall.
The scythesman's care, at early dawn,
Had dressed the gently sloping lawn;
The fitful, sweetly murmuring breeze,
Rustled amidst the giant trees—
Trees which had known no other race
Than that which here assigned their place;
They saw the Norman power invade,
And all around in ruin laid,
Whilst here the Saxon held his ground,
And in his castle safety found;
And still those trees remain a sign,
Coeval with the Ashton line.
Choice shrub and richly decked parterre
Proclaim the fostering hand of care,
Though near that Border-land, which erst
By many a deadly feud was curst,
When Scot and Briton, face to face,
Madly forgot their common race;
And though fell East and withering North,
Their baneful blasts oft thunder forth.

Such here the prospect as, I ween,
In Britain's isles alone is seen;
For scarce the straining eye can mark
Where ends the thickly-studded park,
Stretching afar, and farther still,
Till lost in shadow of the hill.
It rises bold, that hill, and steep,
And now such light its top doth keep,
Almost the eyesight may discern
Heather and furze, and bush and fern,
Crowning its sides and summit wild
By cultivation undefiled,
As nature's witness left to stand,
To shame man's proud yet puny hand.
Forgetting all their native fear,
See sport around the dappled deer,
As owning love's o'ermastering charm,
That stills and banishes alarm.

But what can mean that festive board,
Spread on the bright lawn's velvet sward?
What are those groups that gather round
More and more thickly on the ground?
Those cheerful sounds, those gestures gay,

Betoken, sure, a gala-day;
And two are there, from while to while,
Greeting each guest with kindly smile,
With courtesy unfeigned and free,
That speeds, not checks, the honest glee.
The one of stalwart growth was seen,
Of dignified and noble mien;
Years had not bent that form erect,
Nor aught of native vigour wrecked;
And yet his hair was more than grey,
And on his brow there seemed to weigh
A load of ever-present grief,
That scarce could win a respite brief.
Was it some secret load of sin,
Heaving and labouring from within,
Paying in vain, yet drear remorse,
The forfeit of an evil course?
Or had repentance left a trace
Which time itself could not efface,
Which, sure of pardon from on high,
Must pardon to itself deny?
Or is it but some cross or care,
In which his hand had had no share,
But which his soul can ne'er forget,

Though oft repelled, returning yet ?
In that subdued and gentle eye
Vainly we search the mystery,
Yet cannot deem that crime or guilt,
In form so fair, a home hath built.
Ah ! who is sure, in human face,
The history of its past to trace ?
For, to the inward heart alone,
Its bitterness or joys are known.

But, fondly leaning on his arm,
Is one who seems to bear a charm—
A spell, as though of magic power,
To gild the scene, the day, the hour.
Hers is not beauty such as shines
In Grecian statue's faultless lines,
With inexpressive beauty cold,
Though perfect in its classic mould ;
Nor yet her form or features such
As Titian's or Raphael's touch,
Clothed with ideal charms divine,
Exhausting even nature's mine.
Hers was the features' changeful play,
Like sun and shower on April day ;

Her auburn hair, her eye of blue,
Bespeak her Saxon lineage true.
Thou couldst not say what in her won
The victory in thy heart begun,
Yet nothing wouldst thou wish to change
For aught in fancy's widest range.
That forehead high, that brow so wide,
Show wit, and sense, and prudence tried;
That glance so firm, that smile so sweet,
Appear in harmony to meet;
Unforced that smile, of kindness born,
That knows nor hate, nor pride, nor scorn;
Yet *there* a tinge of sadness dwelt
Which both the friend and stranger felt,
And wondered what that grief could be
From which the maiden was not free;
For all knew well her changeless part
In kind Sir Gilbert's manly heart,
And knew her love to him as strong
As ere was read in tale or song:
With youth, wealth, beauty on her side,
What gift had Providence denied,
That care or sorrow should invade
And cast their cold and noisome shade?

Was it her sympathetic eye
Oft marked her parent's rising sigh ?
Or was, in truth, that tender breast
By burden of its own oppressed ?—
Sole treasure of his heart and home
Had Ellen to her sire become ;
In her he saw the image fair
Of one whose loveliness so rare
Had gained his heart in early youth,
And, won by proved affection's truth,
For one short year to him was lent
E'en as a blissful vision, sent
To give a gleam of Heaven on earth,
Then prove what all below is worth.
And so he to himself did seem
To wake as from a baseless dream,
And learn what tortures can impart
The feelings of a widowed heart.
That one short year of wedded bliss,—
That last, that agonizing kiss,
When she so calmly bade farewell—
For earth—to him she loved so well,—
Had made existence seem a blank
At which his inmost spirit shrank.

But she had known a mother's joy
Ere death could sense or thought destroy;
Faintly her dying voice could claim
To give the child her own dear name—
Sole pledge of wedded love so true,
His Ellen to Sir Gilbert grew
The object of his only care,
The only flower that life could bear.
He saw her each fond wish fulfil,—
By guardian angels kept from ill,—
And each behest or look obey,
Ruled by affection's gentle sway;
Each year, as on it fleetly sped,
Fresh charms and graces on her shed.

Nor social board, nor sports of field,
Could to Sir Gilbert pleasure yield;
The duties that should ever wait
Upon the rights of wealth and state;—
The treasures which each student draws
Who searches into Nature's laws;—
These could his busier hours engage,
Or share with learning's deathless page.
His leisure moments to beguile

Needed but Ellen's voice and smile ;
For she was ever at his side
Companion of each walk or ride :
Yet, lest her mind should be imbued
With too great love of solitude,
And she in after years should rue
The world was hidden from her view,—
He shunned not, with ungenial eye,
The rites of hospitality.
His neighbours all in turn possessed
The privilege of host and guest ;
Of art and nature she had seen
Much, Europe's greater seas between ;
Her ready eye and cultured mind
In this a true delight could find ;
And she had early gained a store
Of thought, of legend, and of lore.

And now at length has dawned the day
For which Sir Gilbert wont to pray,
When reason with the law unites
To give her of full age the rights.
Of kindred had Sir Gilbert none,
Or did the knowledge of them shun,

His was a hospitable roof,
And yet, 'twas known he kept aloof
From intimacy's closer bonds,
Where heart to answering heart responds.
And so he feared,—should greedy Death
Call him to yield this mortal breath,
Before his Ellen yet could be
Of her own acts and fortune free,—
Lest his life's treasure should be left
Of his defending arm bereft,
And amid strangers should be thrown,
Strangers at heart, though early known ;
Or else be, like a chattel, laid
'Neath the law's stern and chilly shade.

In honour of the wished-for day
Was gathered all that vast array ;
From all the district round they came,—
(Spread far and wide was Ellen's fame ;)
They came to pay their homage meet,
The Heiress of the Hall to greet.
To all that mixed but duteous crowd
She, not unmoved, yet graceful bowed ;
Yet more, she marked the infirm and poor,

Relieved each winter at her door,
Whose unpremeditated words
Thrilled of her heart the inmost chords :
But, most of all, a youthful band
Advancing timid, hand in hand,
Taught by her gentle, loving care,
To know of God, and Heaven, and prayer.
See at their head a form advance
Recalling days of sunny France ;
The cross and rosary at her side
She strives not to display nor hide ;
The dress and whole attire proclaim
Her dedicate to Mercy's name ;
One of that glorious sisterhood
That hath 'mid wreck of empires stood,
In Christian heroism strong
Transcending all the power of song ;
E'en though, alloyed by error's dross,
Their work be doomed to " suffer loss."
In sunken cheek and hollow eye
Couldst thou the fruit of vigils spy ;
In those pale features dwelt the trace,
The lingering elements of grace ;
That hue so colourless and dead,

Tells of lost charms and beauty fled.
And with her walks an aged man
Of looks subdued, and features wan,
Seeming unconsciously to plead
The cause of a declining creed.
Unswerving had the Ashton race
Counted apostacy disgrace ;
No torture had denial wrung
Of faith to which they fondly clung ;
Ay, fondly to those days they turned
When persecution's faggot burned.
One ancestor had suffered death,
Confessing Rome with latest breath,
What time, fell champion of his cause,
Proud Henry trampled on the laws,—
His country's laws and those of God,—
A sinful nation's chastening rod.

A larger youthful troop behold
With agile step their ranks unfold,
Led by a man whom middle age
Had stamped with aspect firm and sage ;
Although he wore refinement's mark
Brightened by mind's all-quickening spark,

Yet meet was he to breast the strife,
The conflict of a pastor's life.
In that old pile of Norman mould
That rears its massive front so bold,
Week after week, and year by year,
He taught of God the holy fear,
Delivering with earnest tones
The message wakening conscience owns;
And, still untired, with soothing voice
Bade saint and penitent rejoice:
And on his arm there fondly leaned
One from the world's allurements weaned;
And yet that world she well had known,
Whose joys she left without a groan,
A lowly pastor's lot to share;—
Lightening his burden and his care,
Partaking all his toils and bliss,
Say, did she that false glitter miss?
The pledges of that love so true
She would with loftiest thoughts imbue;
For God, and not for earth to train,
The road to glory and to gain.

A youth and maiden at their side,

Of years mature, in silence bide ;
Let it suffice me now to say
The kindly pastor's guests were they.
Unknown to all, and knowing none,
They seem the curious gaze to shun ;
Yet all the while the furtive glance
Is fixed as in a waking trance :
With keenest interest they watch
Each passing scene and act to catch ;
But chief their eager eye and thought
Sir Gilbert and his daughter sought ;
Mysteriously their every sense
Seems wrapt as by a spell intense.

And now, at secret signal given,
The intervening crowd is riven ;
Nimbly the youthful bands unite,
And Ellen's eye and ear invite ;
Each head a flowery chaplet wears,
Each hand a bunch or garland bears,
And as their simple gift they bring
With faltering accents thus they sing :—

Hail to thee, dear Lady, friend
  To the helpless and distrest,
May upon thine head descend
  Sweetest recompence and best!

In the forefront rank of life
  God's decree hath bid thee stand,
May He safely through its strife
  Guide thee to the better land!

And from amaranthine bower
  Strew thy path from youth to age,
Every gift and blessing shower
  That may cheer thy pilgrimage!

Flowers that ne'er decay or fade,
  As do these with treacherous bloom,
But beneath the grave's cold shade,
  Shall, unwithering, deck thy tomb.

Who to God and His impart
  Flower and first-fruit of their days,—
Willing service of the heart,—
  Crownèd are with deathless bays.

They who lowliest are on earth,
  And on humblest duties wait,
These are they of noblest birth,
  These alone the truly great:

For they His blest image bear
  Who despised the shame and cost,
And, of worlds eternal heir,
  Came to save the vile and lost.

They ceased: at first there came a pause,
And then subdued, not faint, applause.
And now the shades of dewy eve
Warn the enchanted spot to leave;
Each to his home the concourse turn,
With chastened thoughts that inly burn.

CANTO II.

MOONLIGHT.

As Ellen and her sire withdrew
Within the Hall and out of view,
She marked that on his brow there sate
The print of that relentless fate,
That e'en his brightest hours would haunt,
As though in mockery and vaunt.
Was it deluding fancy's guile
That made him seem to her, the while
Those children sang their votive lay,
As though he fain would shrink away?
He cast a look she could not scan,
Ere yet their gifts or song began,
Upon the vicar and the group,
That ushered in that minstrel troop.
She knew it was not anger's frown
On the good pastor louring down;

Too well she knew the high esteem
Her father felt for him, to deem
That this unsought but kindly act
From that esteem could aught detract.
The aged priest would often sigh
At favour shown to heresy;
And the good nun would fervent pray,
Lest faith should at the Hall decay.
For, though that pastor never swerved
From fealty to the Church he served—
The Church of Ridley, Hooker, Ken,
The Church of Britain's noblest men—
Yet oft was he Sir Gilbert's guest,
And often to himself confessed,
Howe'er his spirit might be pained,
A glimpse of heaven on earth he gained;
For well wot he that Ellen's mind
No rest in fancies vain could find;
Though to the Blessed Virgin's name
She yielded honour none can claim,
He knew her as that Virgin mild,
Pure, yet in lowliness a child,
Weighing and keeping in her heart
Whate'er of God his words impart.

Though she to saint and angel bowed,
'Twas but as a transparent cloud
That cannot dim the fount of light,
Striving in vain to cheat the sight;
Through all her heaven-taught spirit soared
To theirs and hers—the common Lord.

In Ellen's father there was found
Reserve, no searcher e'er could sound;
But yet, at times, a transient beam
Would from his inmost being gleam,
Revealing, all unmeant, the glow
True piety alone can know.
On superstition's legend-lore
Contempt he oft was heard to pour;
But Pascal's pride-subduing page
In secret would his thoughts engage,
Or his, whose pure, yet world-wide fame,
Is linked for aye with Cambray's name.

Soon did her sire dispel the gloom
That seemed a harbinger of doom;
And now with sweet, yet studied smile,
(Affection's oft-repeated guile,

By which from her and all he tried
The secret of his soul to hide,)
Did he his labouring spirit force
To playful, calm, and fond discourse:
"With pageant meet, and queenly port,
Thou held'st this day thy mimic court;
No longer must I now conceal,
What sooner I would not reveal—
That still thy destiny prepares
Its penalty of princely cares.
To-morrow eve must thou again,
'Mid courtiers and admirers reign;
Within our walls shall gathered be
Higher yet motley company,
With music and the dance to chase
The hours in ever-quickening race.
Thou know'st, the inmates of the manse
Can all such festive joys enhance,
And they are pledged their aid to lend,
Discordant elements to blend.
But say, what youth and maid were they
Who graced with them the scene to-day?
Ere morning dawns, I would supply
Our seeming lack of courtesy,

And do on thee devolve the task,
Their presence at our feast to ask."

" 'Tis strange, dear father, but in sooth,
I noticed neither maid nor youth ;
My sight and mind were wholly bent
On those dear children's meek intent ;
But yet I hear our neighbours tell,
These here awhile have come to dwell.
Our vicar's fame is known, 'twould seem,
Where Isis rolls her classic stream ;
His course complete, the youth was fain
That nobler, higher art to gain,
By which the erring soul to win,
Loosing the treacherous bonds of sin ;
And, 'neath our friend's experienced eye,
Prepare for sacred ministry.
The only bliss for which he lives
Is that an only sister gives ;
Early of parents' care bereft,
These two alone on earth were left ;
But each in other's spirit finds
That purest love which closest binds.
Just orphaned, they together sought

The dear retreat of cultured thought,
Where time hath cast that mellowed tone
The Muses ever love to own;
Where all breathes meditative calm,
To wounded, weary spirits, balm;
Where tower and cloister, bower and shade,
No ruder, earth-born cares invade;
Where, conscious of her coming sway,
Proud Isis holds her royal way,
And flower-fringed Cherwell lures to rove
'Mid dappled meads or peaceful grove.

"Of humble lineage and degree,
They yet from penury are free;
And nature, with no niggard hand,
From hidden wealth at her command,
In mockery of human pride,
Gave gifts and graces birth denied.
In academic strife, 'tis said,
Not once alone the van he led;
Yet ever were with meekness worn
The laurels from his rivals torn.
She, with melodious voice and skill,
Can dullest ear with rapture fill;

Nor less her pencil's magic might
To charm and cheat the doubting sight;
United by affection rare,
Unsevered would they here repair.
Such, dearest father, the romance,
Shrouded within a village manse:
'Twas only yester eve they came,
Yet not unheralded by fame,
For such the ready fashioned tale,
That credence gains throughout the vale."

Nought of the tale Sir Gilbert missed,
Gently his daughter's brow he kissed,
And gave his blessing for the night,
With cheerful voice and features bright.
Arrears (he said) of business pressed
Ere yet he could retire to rest:
"But thee I counsel not to lose
The needed period of repose;
For this day's scene hath tried thy nerve,
And still thy strength thou must reserve
Against to-morrow evening's feast,
Ere thy fatigues and cares have ceased."

In his lone chamber's quiet hour
Did he his grateful spirit pour
To Him who bade him see the day
When Ellen might pursue her way,
Of years and of experience rife,
Through the uncertain paths of life.
So far his mind a load had lost,
By which it hitherto was tossed;
But other thoughts and fears there were,
That clouded o'er his brow with care;
These now he pondered, but in vain
Sought refuge from his being's bane.
It could not be,—that notion strange,
Culled from exhaustless fancy's range,
That had, that evening, flitted rash,
Like lightning's momentary flash,
That sudden pours a flood of light,
Then leaves the landscape wrapped in night.
By prayer and meditation deep,
And penitential thoughts, that steep
With tears the soft yet manly eye,
And draw the heavy-laden sigh,
His care-worn heart to still he strove
With soothing thoughts of heavenly love.

And if, before his eyelids closed,
Or from its strife the soul reposed,
He fondly, by his creed beguiled,
Prayed for the mother of his child,
His error with indulgence try,
Affection's venial heresy.

But hope, to youth a welcome guest,
Fluttered afresh in Ellen's breast,
And bade her trust her father's mood
Would be by conquering time subdued;
The advent of this natal day
Would many a care and fear allay;
For well and inwardly she knew
The trials of affection true.

Now, in an oratory, meet
For pure devotion's calm retreat,
Beginning with the mystic sign,
In name of the Almighty Trine,
Her lonely orisons she paid—
Rejoicing angels watched the maid.
Near her, a crucifix of gold
To loving eyes its story told;

See here, by Guido's tender hand,
The agonizèd Saviour stand;
There, old Giotto's rude design
Made the Madonna's form divine,
Fruit of a reverential mind,
With poetry of soul combined,
And not, as art of later birth,
Lovely in loveliness of earth.
On these the waning tapers threw
A solemn and unearthly hue,
That glareless, soft, and mellowed light
Which best can holy thoughts invite.
And if, as there she humbly knelt,
Her eyes on outward objects dwelt,—
Say, shall we lightly dare to blame
What kindled thus a heavenly flame?
E'en may her simple string of beads
Have that whereon devotion feeds.
And if, in ancient classic tongue,
Sweet hymns of early times she sung,
Perchance they did not aught the less
Her faith and gratitude express.

Spirits there are, unconscious freed

From trammels of a faulty creed,
Who God with single eye have sought;
Them grace Divine itself hath taught,
The edge of error's weapons turned,
And all their dross refining burned.
Fairer is love, though light be dim,
In the all-searching eye of Him
Who scans the bosom's inmost taint,
Than clearest light where love is faint.

Say, whence comes sweetest slumber? Whence?
From balmy bowers of innocence:
And such was Ellen's; visions bright
Floated before her spirit's sight,
Till sleep, with envious lingering look
Reluctant those soft eyes forsook,
Ere yet the quickening summer sun
Much of his daily course had run.
Now quivered through the balmy air
Her morning notes of praise and prayer,
As she her casement open threw,
To greet the soul-inspiring view,
Where hill, grove, meadow, bathed in light
Adoring rapture all invite.

Swift flew that day, the sunny hours
That seemed to strew her path with flowers ;
And ere the shades of night had cast
A mantle on the radiance past,
The old baronial hall was dight
With blaze of artificial light,
As though to flout the modest moon
Whence, as in Ellen's honour, soon
Should issue forth a chastened beam
That might through bay and casement stream ;
Nay, in such rich profusion rare
Was shed of lamp and torch the glare,
As in defiance seemed their blaze
E'en of the sun's departing rays.
And as the lights their lustre flung
The hall's quaint furniture among,
How many relics, dear to thought,
Before the inquiring eye were brought !
Relics, that round the musing mind
A chain of harmony can wind
Of power to lull this work-day life
With all its petty cares and strife,
And conjure up the magic spell
That doth in olden legend dwell.

Here, first, a rude and ponderous sword
(The annals of the house record)
Worn by the earliest Ashton Thane,
With which he slew a stalwart Dane,
When, by stout-hearted Alfred's side,
He helped to turn invasion's tide;
There the thick helm that could not save
Its wearer from a soldier's grave,
What time, on Hastings' well-fought field,
His life did Edgar Ashton yield,
Where luckless Harold died in vain,
And knew, too late, ambition's bane,
Compensed by an undying name
In the emblazoned roll of fame.

But what in history's romance
Can so the attunèd ear entrance
As that emprise, so wildly grand,
That sought to win the Holy Land?
Ah! fond, but superstitious awe,
For mercy's King the sword to draw!
See here the dinted coat of mail
Whose sight would turn the Moslem pale,
For well he knew, the Ashton hand

Could poise the spear and wield the brand.
Forgetting all his Norman pride,
At valour with his own that vied,
Richard, the lion-hearted king,
On Saxon fingers placed that ring
Which now, as if in fondness, pressed
That grim old hauberk's time-worn breast.
See there the rusted spurs and lance
That urged whilom the flower of France;
For scions of the house had fought
At Cressy, Poitiers, Agincourt;
Of knightly spurs had earned the meed
For prowess in the hour of need;
Had praise and admiration won
From Edward and his hero-son;
Impetuous Henry's falcon eye
Owned them the soul of chivalry,
And eke the badge and ribband gave
That decks the bosom of the brave.

Foes only to their country's foes,
The Ashtons joined with neither Rose;
Relics of that unhallowed war
Were none, their patriot fame to mar.

But when rebellion stalked the land
Dissolving law and order's band;
When fanatics with feigned zeal
For God, and Britain's common weal,
Assailed the altar and the throne,
And—tolerant of themselves alone—
Proscribed the old ancestral faith
For which his grandsire welcomed death,—
His rapier then Sir Herbert took
Nor e'er the martyr-king forsook;
At Edgehill, Naseby, Marston-Moor,
Dauntless the battle's brunt he bore.
Ah! sainted monarch! cypress now,
Not laurel, decks thy lofty brow,
In that rude, hasty portrait, ta'en
Amidst the wounded and the slain.

Holbein's, Vandyke's, and Lely's skill
Combined the panelled walls to fill;
Memorials such as art can rear
Of statesman, courtier, cavalier.
And, with them, many a stately dame
Whom Britain not alone could claim,
But sought and won from o'er the main,

From France, and Italy, and Spain.

Too long, my muse, thou lingered hast
'Mid deeds and memories of the past,
The doings of the festal night
Our wandering fancies now invite.
Came bidden guests from far and near,
The squire, the knight, the dame, the peer
And others—you might plainly see—
Of humbler rank and pedigree.—
Observed of all, the motley throng
Moved Ellen noiselessly among;
Greeted by all, and greeting each
With gracious look and ready speech;
But none so prized each passing smile,
Or genial word, as Eustace Lyle;
As if entranced, he fondly hung
On every accent of her tongue.
Of higher lineage, nobler mien,
Was none within that hall, I ween;
And soon around the whisper flew
He had Sir Gilbert's leave to sue
For Ellen's hand,—and worthy seemed
To win the prize of which he dreamed.

Among the chief, the stranger pair,
Unconscious, observation share,
Though unobtrusive and unknown,
And on the sight intent alone.
In Clara Shirley's form and face
Thou couldst not beauty's signet trace;
Nor was in Walter's features aught
The superficial glance that caught:
But something dignified, refined,
Bespoke in both the cultured mind,
The heritage of gentle birth
When joined with intellect and worth.

And now each youthful heart beat high
As waxed the guiltless revelry;
Maidens and favoured youths advance
And thread the mazes of the dance;
Then, spell-bound, every ear attends,
Her charms while song to music lends.
Of Clara Shirley, rumour told
Her voice and ear bore music's mould;
Ellen, ere long, preferred her prayer
To play and sing some favourite air;
Modest, yet unabashed, the maid

Denial nor excuses said,
But quick the proffered harp she strung
And thus in silvery tones she sung:—

SONG.

A fount I know whence waters flow
In peaceful jocund tide,
Though over rocks, in countless shocks,
Unchecked and clear they glide.

And as they fleet, so bright and sweet
Are these to sight and taste,
That e'en the eye, as they run by,
Bewails the joy they waste.

From the same source, with equal force
Do bitterest waters flow,
And poison bring from that fell spring,
To joy and peace a foe.

What fount is this that teems with bliss,
And eke with misery too?
This two-fold name must Memory claim,
With balm imbued and true.

Thus—happy hours in Pleasure's bowers
By man in dalliance passed,
Are tinged with gloom that dims their bloom,
And lasts as they too last.

The golden time of youthful prime,
When Sorrow wrings the heart,
Will often rush with baneful gush,
And fresh annoy impart.

She ghosts can raise of by-gone days
  When we basked in the sunlight's beam,
What once were joys, now broken toys,
  Wrecks drifting down her stream.

When Conscience wakes, she vengeance takes
  Of hours to virtue lost,
And casts a shade by memory made
  On that which sparkled most.

But oft the mind will, guiltless, find
  Of self-reproach the sting,
Which yet conceals the wound it deals,
  Like brooding Vampire's wing.

And Heaven's just law will oft withdraw
  The veil that darkly shrouds
Things vainly sought, with mystery fraught,
  And scatter error's clouds.

Yes, leaves there be of that same tree
  Erst steeped in Marah's rill,
Can yield relief to time-worn grief,
  And every murmur still.

While thus she sung, note after note
On unseen pinions seemed to float,
And the enraptured being bear
To regions of serener air,
There the resistless soul to wrap
In sweet Oblivion's downy lap.
So great the magic of those tones

Whose power the wildering fancy owns,
They seem adventuring to try
The very depths of melody.

Whoe'er had marked Sir Gilbert well,
Might of emotion's victory tell,
Yet joined he calmly in the praise
The wondering guests in chorus raise.
But one within the hall was found
Whom that weird voice's melting sound
Did less than any else beguile,—
Oh! need I say 'twas Eustace Lyle?
Love, that constrains the eye and ear
One form to see, one voice to hear,
Had fettered his; no other strain
Save Ellen's could his spirit gain.
And now his anxious looks confessed
A lover's trepidation, lest
Clara alone the palm should bear
He deemed she should but faintly share.
On Ellen urged he the request
Which others, clustering round her, pressed;
Not long the conscious maid was mute,
But thus accompanied her lute:—

SONG.

Ah! Friendship's a flower that will bloom, I trow,
  If thou plant it in fitting soil;
And day by day, as thou seest it grow,
  'Twill repay thee for all thy toil.

In the balmy shade of a holy home
  Self-sown will affection spring,
Like shoots that strike in a deep rich loam,
  And around their branches fling.

Yes! in the still depths of that sacred bower
  It will thrive the more for shade;
From Heaven refreshed with the dew and shower,
  Nor fragrance nor hue can fade.

But love is a wild and wanton weed
  That yields nor to art nor force;
Unbidden 'twill rise with fairy speed,
  And hold its capricious course.

Seek thou to fence it in reason's bound,
  And 'twill baffle thy choicest skill,
Till nought but a void and cheerless ground
  Is the heart thou wouldst have it fill.

And with all thy searching thou canst not tell
  Why, tended, it will not thrive;
Thou shalt only know 'tis a secret spell
  That bids it spring up and live.

Clear through the hall the cadence rung
As thus the guileless Siren sung;
There reigned a stillness, not of death,
While every listener held his breath.
Now whispers break upon the calm
As each to each assigns the palm:
Fain would each guest the spell prolong
Of dance, of music, and of song;
But soon the mellow midnight chime
Proclaims the ruthless flight of time.
Himself each, lingering, scarce can bear
From such enchanted scene to tear;
Yet homeward see the various train
Ere the still favouring moonbeam wane,
Their homage paid, departing thence
In ecstasy of ravished sense:
But Ellen lingered yet to gaze
On that fair moon's unclouded rays;
Unruffled, tranquil, pure, and calm,
Her soul could taste that holy balm.
Wide-world enchantress, queen of night,
Thou source of undefined delight,
What fascinations in thee dwell
Beyond the power of words to tell!

Thy consecrating beams can throw
A spell round meanest things below,
And e'en impart a higher zest
To that which fairest is and best:
Let not the colder fancy deem
It was but frenzied poet's dream,
That potent sprite and fairy wait
Around thy pallid car of state,
Whom of broad day the feverish glare
Back to their elfin haunts shall scare.
What, feeble though, and vague the ray,
Thou sheddest on the wanderer's way,
Thou failest not his steps to guide
Away from precipice's side,
From danger keep'st him and from scath,
While beauty hovers on his path:
Thou emblem of illusion art,
That sees in all the fairer part,
Subduing harsher hue and tone,
To clothe with colours of her own.
Oh! say not *that* can be a cheat
Which has in loving heart its seat!
Thrice happy they who thus can taste
Of pleasures Time can ne'er lay waste;

To whom, as from exhaustless mine,
Such priceless jewel wont to shine,
The brightest, purest, noblest gem
In nature's circling diadem,
Bidding the chastened spirit rise
To spheres of higher harmonies.

CANTO III.

DAYLIGHT.

Days, weeks had passed, and still the while
Sir Gilbert's guest was Eustace Lyle;
Day after day he lingered on,
As one intent a strain to con,
Who knows not till the day is gone.
By every guileless art he strove
The fervour of his love to prove,
Nor yet did she, like beauty vain,
The homage of his heart disdain;
Playmates in childhood and in youth,
She long had known his worth and truth.
Not distant far the fair domain,
The Lyles from Norman grant retain:
Sir Gilbert and his sire had been
Companions in life's early scene,

Them still a closer union bound
Than with Sir Gilbert else was found.
If ever soul was free from guile,
That praise belonged to Eustace Lyle;
To title born, and name, and wealth,
'Twas good alone he did by stealth.
Oscott's monastic pile his school,
'Neath Loyola's relentless rule
He baffled all their wonted skill
To train in subtle ways of ill,
Yet there he did not fail to learn
Of self-restraint the lesson stern,
Unconscious votary of a creed
That crushes both the flower and weed.
A fonder, more devoted son,
That step-dame Church had never won;
His the uncompromising zeal
That scorns its object to conceal;
Of heresy the smallest stain
From him could no indulgence gain;
One master-thought his soul possessed,
To do his Church's strict behest,
Whate'er she taught, whate'er she bad,
In stern reality was clad;

Those tenderer lines that wield a charm,
And half redeem her creed from harm,
Were by his eye too dimly seen,
His heart from Error's toils to wean;
Ideal beauty, softness, grace,
Found not within his bosom place;
Unconscious he of those delights
To which, in youth, the muse invites;
Not poesy could him inspire
With aught of her ætherial fire:
For action formed, his soul was prone
To energetic deeds alone,
To breast the surging waves of life
With conflict, toil, and turmoil rife;
The sole romance his heart e'er knew,
The love that him to Ellen drew,
Which o'er his being, like a dream,
Had thrown a bright but transient gleam.
But Ellen's self in regions dwelt
Whose breathings he had never felt—
Regions of fancy rich and strange,
Through which her spirit loved to range;
Hers rapt abstraction, that can soar
To realms where earth is heard no more,

Where hushed is discord's jarring sound,
That shun's imagination's bound.
Such spell can contemplation wind
Around the meditative mind;
Such temple can weird Fancy rear—
A fitting shrine for bard or seer.

Too well—for Eustace—Ellen saw
Divergence in their being's law:
What then? methinks I hear thee ask,
Beseemed it Ellen wear a mask?
Ah! hast thou then as yet to learn
'Tis hard adoring love to spurn?
Nay, more; the maiden inly strove
To pay his ardent love with love;
She felt his nature, just and pure,
Would partial happiness secure,
Nor had her father sought to hide
The wish that she should be his bride;
To filial duty ever true,
She would each wayward thought subdue.
Thus, day by day, the two would rove
Through flower-enamelled mead and grove,
O'er moor, and dell, and fern-clad hill,

By river bank, or babbling rill.
Each relic of historic age
Excuse affords for pilgrimage;
Fossil, or bird, or insect new,
Or flower, by turns attract their view.
He of her palfrey tries the speed,
Against his own careering steed;
Or else afoot, with slackened pace,
Some devious woodland path they trace,
And talk of days to them long by,
That prompt the alternate smile and sigh.
And, day by day, as evening's shade
On all the landscape round is laid,
With good Sir Gilbert they divide
The tranquil joys of eventide,
And in smooth course the minutes flow,
As in the sunlight's quickening glow.
Then Ellen modulates her voice,
To lay or ballad of his choice;
And once, unbidden, sung again
That all-unheeded warning strain—
Alas! to Eustace sung in vain,
Albeit he had not lost a word,
When on the festal night 'twas heard.

At length arrives the dreaded eve
Ere Eustace meant to take his leave.
Ellen had not retired to rest,
When her Sir Gilbert thus addressed:—
"My child, thou oft hast marked, ere now,
A shade of care upon my brow,
And, ah! how oft doth man seem blithe,
While secret pangs his bosom writhe!
'Tis meet to thee I should impart,
This night, the burden of my heart.
Know, then, this hall and wide domain,
Where thou art deemed by all to reign,
May any day or hour be torn
From us that seem its owners born;
Events may chance, in honour's name,
Fulfilment of a pledge to claim,
Though fault of mine did ne'er incur
That debt that brooks not of demur;
No faithless steward of these lands,
As yet committed to my hands.
Should e'er the dreaded day arise,
I face the world with unshamed eyes—
Ellen, thou and I shall roam
e from our early home,

And those thou ne'er hast known shall dwell
In these dear haunts thou lov'st so well.
For me, I reck not of the loss,
All outward pomp I count but dross;
He whose desires and needs are scant,
Shall best escape the pangs of want.
But when of thee, my child, I think,
I feel my heart within me shrink,
As though on precipice's brink;
Blighted the promise of thy morn,
Thyself a mark for worldlings' scorn,
Condemned in some sequestered cot
With me to share a humble lot.

The depths of penury and care
A gracious Providence doth spare;
A store thy sainted mother left,
Of which thou canst not be bereft.
All this have I to Eustace told,
When first he would his love unfold,
Nor doubt nor fear will he partake,
But loves thee for thine own dear sake;
Nay, rather seems to court the doom
Whose shadows yet but faintly loom,

That thou and I to him should owe
Our part of happiness below;
And now he would, in form, declare
That love I fain would see thee share."

He ceased: in vain he sought to trace
Dismay or dread in Ellen's face,
For no emotion base or weak
Had flushed that pure and placid cheek.
Her arms around his neck she flung,
And to her father fondly clung,
Then calmly spoke—"O, father dear,
Of naught I reck so thou be near;
Ah! vain and light to thee I seem,
That thou so ill of me shouldst deem.
With thee to dwell, for thee to live,
Is highest bliss that earth can give.
Now shall the arts which thou hast taught
Be with a higher purpose fraught,
And pen or pencil, voice or lore,
Give increase to our scanty store;
Nor can that hour be sad or drear
Which sunshine of the heart can cheer;
And if, by heaven's unknown decree,

I e'er should be deprived of thee,
Within some convent's hallowed shade
My home for life and death be made!
Best earthly refuge, I should hail
The sacred, world-renouncing veil;
Yet not the days that heaven doth lend
In contemplation only spend;
In barren fast and vigil waste
The hours whose joys I may not taste—
But, as Port-Royal's house of yore
Rich fruit for Christ and virtue bore,
The young for holy church to train,
The sinner's deadened ear to gain,
And cheer, till hope itself has fled,
The painful couch and dying bed.
Nay, more; forgive if maiden pride
Forbid me now to be a bride.
Breathes not, I trow, in Britain's isle
A nobler soul than Eustace Lyle,
Yet e'en to him, a dowerless wife,
I would not owe the means of life.
Should heaven, within the coming year,
The clouds from o'er our pathway clear,
And we securely still retain

The right to this our old domain,
From Ashton's heiress let him claim
The guerdon of a constant flame.

While to Sir Gilbert's master-grief
These words of Ellen gave relief,
Yet saw he vanish into air
The fabric of his hopes and care;
But naught he said—with accent mild,
And faltering voice, he blessed his child.

Not long, the morn, was Eustace mute,
Ere he in form preferred his suit;
His tale of love unchecked he told,
With eloquence of nature's mould.
In firm, yet not forbidding tones,
Such as unswerving reason owns,
Answer did Ellen thus return—
To lover's ear how cold and stern!
"'Twas only yesternight I knew
What, Eustace, thou so kind and true,
Wast fain from me awhile to hide,
As though thou couldst arrest the tide
That threatens in its rise to merge

Our fortune with o'erwhelming surge.
Unmeet were I for earth's best prize,
Could I such love as thine despise,
Yet must, methinks, by dowerless maid
To adverse fate be tribute paid.
How, think'st thou, could my spirit bear
With thee the sweets of wealth to share,
And head a board with dainties spread,
A debtor for my daily bread,
Leaving a stricken sire to cope
With penury uncheered by hope,
Or humbled, reach his earthly goal
A pensioner on strangers' dole?
For one short year, then, let us be
From contract and from promise free;
But if, ere summer bloom again,
We may our heritage retain,
From risk of an intruder sure,
From law's or honour's breach secure,
Then will I not thy suit deny,
But yield me thine to live and die.
Forgive that Ellen Ashton's pride
Bids her awhile unpledged to bide;
Nor pains nor cost of search shall fail

From mystery to rend the veil,
And sure such time shall set at rest
Doubt, canker of the human breast."

Himself the youth could scarce command,
While to his lips he pressed her hand,
And, silent, cast a long last look
Ere he the haunted ground forsook.
Marked was his brow with anxious care,
Yet free from torture of despair;
Such spell in Ellen's parting smile
Was found his sorrow to beguile.

Ere Eustace his long leave had ta'en,
Sir Gilbert did in kindness feign
His road, that morn, some distance lay
With Eustace on his homeward way;
And forth the two together rode,
Each having at his heart a load.
With converse kind Sir Gilbert strove
To soothe the pangs of wounded love;
Ah! where the magic, where the spell,
That can these doubts and terrors quell?
Him yet he vainly sought to cheer

With prospects of the coming year:
'Twas likelier (he averred), "by far,
Naught would betide his bliss to mar;
Though meet it was to sound alarm
E'en at the very shade of harm."
He vowed and vowed each nerve to strain
The clearing of his doubts to gain,
And ere the year its course should run,
Ellen, he trusted, would be won;
"Whate'er, by heaven's decree, betide,
May she, my Eustace, be thy bride!"

And now they reach the green expanse
That lay around the modest manse,
To cross, hard by, a time-worn bridge
That spanned the stream from ridge to ridge;
Precious to painter's eye it stood
Over the swoll'n and raging flood,
That quaint and mouldering pile of wood.
The passing hinds of danger warn,
Sir Gilbert laughed their fears to scorn,
And undeterred had ta'en the lead,
Eustace close following with his steed.
Ere midway yet from bank to bank,

They rued their faith in treacherous plank;
With boding sound the timbers creak,
And, with the strain unwonted, break.
Then, helpless, horse and rider sink,
Removed alike from either brink.
Vain was the power of man or horse
To stem the torrent's heightened force.
Though powers of mind and body all
Remain uninjured by the fall;
Though skilful each and strong to swim,
Could neither extricate a limb;
Baggage, accoutrement, and steed
Combine all action to impede;
Each deemed he drew his latest breath,
Unlooked for prize to ravening death.
A life of concentrated thought
That speck of time before them brought,
And Ellen's image was to each
The latest thought the mind could reach;
When all grew dim, her image still
With anguish could the bosom thrill.

Hard by lay moored a fisher's boat
For ready usage kept afloat,

And now two men with out-stretched oar
Propel it from the steepy shore;
By skill and strength they stem the tide,
Deftly the cumbrous bark they guide.
One headlong thence was seen to rush,
Despite the stream's unwonted flush;
Intent the ebbing lives to save,
Behold him breast the sea-like wave;
And now he nears the drowning men—
Seizes first one, the other then.
Like corpses that shall breathe no more
They lie upon the bark's damp floor;
'Tis Walter Shirley's practised hand
That speeds them to the nearer strand.

The rumour of the strange mischance
Had reached the tenants of the manse;
And now by friendly hands are borne
The two from grave of waters torn.
Clara, the pastor, and his wife,
Watch for returning signs of life;
With rapturous joy at length they mark
Slowly relumed the vital spark.
Each, as he woke with deep-drawn sigh,

As though defrauded not to die,
Sought Ellen with inquiring eye,
Then wildly gazed with vacant stare
In marvel that she was not there.

When Ellen heard the varied tale,
She changed from fair to ashy pale;
Awhile she strove in vain, but soon
Her soul was locked in death-like swoon.
When first returned the flood of life,
Sat by her side the pastor's wife;
And safe, but feeble yet, and led,
Her father stood beside her bed.
In either what emotions rose,
Such as who feels them only knows!
Her transports how can language tell,
When on her father's neck she fell?
Or how she did, in whisper sweet,
Her sire's and Lyle's deliverer greet?
Better to stay my hand, I ween,
Than seek to paint that sacred scene.
And where is Lyle? He is not there
The feelings of that hour to share.
The love, whose fires within him burn,

At first had prompted his return;
But strange forebodings, strange and sad,
Fulfilment of that thought forbade;
He tarries at the manse the night,
Thence to pursue his homeward flight.

Weeks, months have fled: and winter's frost
Succeeds to summer, autumn lost;
For summer-verdure in its prime,
Nature is decked with hoar and rime;
For early autumn's holy calm
That soothes like sweetly-chanted psalm;
For balmy gales that odours blow,
Was drifted now the unresting snow;
For freshening breeze, the boisterous gale
That makes each tree and sapling wail.
But when the season daunts to roam,
Then is thy glory, Britain's home!
How all too swift,—for bliss,—they glide,
Those evenings by the home fire-side!
What pure and intellectual joy
Doth those too fleeting hours employ!
What heart-illuminating rays
Are darted from the hearth's bright blaze!

On eves like these at Ashton Hall
No wonder it should oft befall
Walter and Clara should be found
That ample antique hearth around.
On science, poesy, and art,
Their thoughts to other each impart,
Or dwell with rapture on the deeds
(Of future glories glorious seeds)
Which history, from age to age,
Records in undecaying page.
Brother nor father e'er can tire
Of Clara's harp and Ellen's lyre.
From Ellen Clara now could claim
All but a sister's love and name;
And oft, alone, on higher themes
Than those of which the worldling dreams,
Their all-transparent thoughts would range
In fond, confiding interchange.
Then sweetly Clara oft would tell
Of holy Scripture's living well,
Whose streams have their primeval fount
In God's own emblematic mount;
While waters stagnant and impure,
Which cisterns of this earth immure,

Can ne'er with quickening influence roll
To quench the thirst of parchèd soul.
Yet free from Puritanic pride,
With pity, not contempt, she eyed
Errors with which that treacherous creed
The craving, loving heart doth feed.
Full well could she the secret guess
Of that mysterious loveliness,
Which Rome, the sorceress, hath thrown
Around the Virgin's fabled throne,—
A halo of æsthetic birth,
Beauty, yet beauty of the earth;
And feeling's tender tribute shed
Around the memory of the dead;
The awe, the gorgeousness intense,
That captive leads the yielding sense;
The mystic and deluding hue
That hides each blemish from the view,
And, like Morgana's pageant, shows
Beauty in fancy's eye that glows;
Such mocking vision she can rear
As in enchanted atmosphere.

Not her's iconoclastic zeal

That crushes all it cannot feel,
And wages undiscerning war,
Intent alone to spoil and mar;
She could, serenely, humbly wise,
With loving error sympathize.
Patient, yet grieving, Ellen heard,
Replying more by sigh than word;
The import of those words she kept
Both when she woke and when she slept.

And Walter from her sire had won
All but the privilege of son;
And in their oft recurring walk,
Of highest themes was wont to talk;
One while, of that corroding rust,
Unchecked tradition's canker-crust;
How mists of error, one by one,
Had dimmed the light of Gospel-sun;
Or else, with ready lore unfold
The Church's primal age of gold,
And show how England's church emerged,
From error and corruption purged.
Such reasonings would Sir Gilbert meet
With answer learned and discreet;

But yet, at times, forbore to swerve
From mild yet dignified reserve.

At length a winter morning came,
It seemed as other days the same;
But oh! how different from its peers
For thoughts and wishes, hopes and fears!
That morning Walter came to tell
That saddest tale, a last farewell.
Pain, disappointment, and surprise,
Were painted in Sir Gilbert's eyes,
And, from his wonted calm awoke,
In earnest, kindly tones he spoke:
(Others were none beside or near
The unrestrained discourse to hear.)
"Why shouldst thou, Walter, seek to leave
Those whom thine absence hence must grieve?
We fondly hoped that thou wert fain
On Border-land a home to gain,
A neighbour, though no longer here
With constant intercourse to cheer.
Say whence this sudden, sad intent
On which thou seem'st so firmly bent?
To thee, preserver of my life, I owe

That friendship's joys again I know;
Ellen," (he faltered at the word,
But Walter every accent heard,)
"Ellen in thee will lose a friend
That might a brother's office lend.
In Clara too she seems to prove
The blessing of a sister's love."

He ended: and with modest pride,
Walter in altered tone replied:
"Honour and care for inward peace
Both bid my sojourn here to cease.
Son of a poor, though sainted sire,
The world denies me to aspire.
Him self-denying faith had led
(So he his heavenly calling read)
In prairie or on frozen beach
The soul-converting word to preach.
Of scanty portion I am heir,
(Oh! might I but his virtues share!)
And did no other cause impede,
Remains the obstacle of creed.
Needs not more plainly I impart
The secret of my labouring heart."

"Walter, thou doubtless deem'st us high
Above the storms which fortune try,
Safely removed beyond the range
Of loss, anxiety, or change.
Yet learn, disturbing tempests lour,
May burst upon our heads this hour;
This hour my wealth and title may
Like baseless vision pass away.
How loosely we our honours hold
Have I to Ellen plainly told,
Nor less revealed to Eustace Lyle
Who sought my daughter's hand erewhile.
But child of Adam ne'er hath known
What now I tell to thee alone.
An elder brother once I had
Whose very smile would make me glad;
Brothers in heart as well as name,
Our habits and pursuits the same,
Our parents' only issue, left
Early of mother's care bereft.
Scarce had he reached the years of man,
Ere he would every subject scan,
And e'en with uncurbed spirit search
The groundworks of our ancient Church.

First came distrust, then carking doubt,
The lamp of early faith died out,
And Rowland was the first to leave
The Church our race did aye receive.
Our sire, Sir Gerard, vainly strove
His firm though gentle mind to move.
Such error could not be atoned,
Thus he his first-born son disowned:
"A barren title, son, shall be
Thine only heritage from me."
For in his stern unflinching eye
No sin could match apostacy;
Of heresy the hated stain
His direst vision and his bane.
Condemned to see his home no more,
Endowed with but a scanty store,
An outcast then my brother fled
Unknown, to gain his daily bread;
Yet was the painful secret known
To us and to himself alone.
From that day forth did never smile
Our father's clouded brow beguile;
He self-consuming, inly felt
The wound his proud resolve had dealt,

And pining, prematurely found
His last long rest in hallowed ground.
Yet ere his closing hour drew near,
Relenting from his word severe,
At my entreaty did he bate
Thus much of his religious hate;
Should son of banished Rowland live,
And sure proof of his lineage give,
His father's ban he should not bear,
But be of Ashton's manors heir.
I've spared nor prayers, nor pains, nor cost,
To gain some tidings of the lost,
And call him home the rank to claim,
And lands that bear the Ashton name.
Yet from that dismal, fatal day
When hence my brother took his way,
I nothing of his fate could learn
Might even to conjecture turn.
In saddest mystery was veiled
The ship in which 'twas said he sailed.
All deemed him lost: e'en sanguine hope
With years of silence could not cope.
Believe me, Walter, much I long
To remedy my father's wrong;

And yet, for Ellen's sake, I dread
The day of early visions fled.
And what imparts a pang more keen
Than yet to bear my lot hath been,
The course of Providence and time
Hath made me share in Rowland's crime.
By reading, prayer, and earnest thought,
To his convictions I am brought;
From memory's store-house oft emerge
The reasons he was wont to urge.
Long have I doubted, as was meet,
Ere as delusion I could treat
The creed my sires would not forsake
For wealth, nor torture and the stake.
No human eye or ken can mark
The kindling of conviction's spark;
At length I hail decision's hour
Matured by thy persuasive power;
No longer now will I delay
To own of truth divine the sway.
Divided wish or feelings never
My Ellen's heart from mine did sever;
Seems as in love did God award
To us a sympathetic chord;

Thy sister's well-weighed words have found
In honest heart responsive sound,
Till she spontaneously is fain
A surer ground of faith to gain,
And publicly with me abjure
Profession of a creed impure.
Eustace, I wot, at once will break
The bonds he was so fain to seek.
Strongly in him as Love did dwell,
Yet stronger is his Church's spell.
Dawned on me *then* a glimmering faint
That Ellen seemed to bear constraint
As though of duty, not of love
Who reigns all other powers above ;
But now, at length, with opened eyes
The truth I gladly recognize.
How different is her mien and eye
When Eustace, or when thou art by !
If thou art steeled with us to bear
The ills it may be ours to share,
I doubt not but her willing choice
May bid thy heart and mine rejoice,
And thou to her may'st plead my leave
Thy suit of marriage to receive."

"Now is of life the battle won!
Loved kinsman, I am Rowland's son!
Credentials of my words I bring
His seal, this locket, and a ring;
And here his own last words, impressed
With trembling hand, to thee addressed.
When gracious Heaven my sire did save
From shipwreck in the Atlantic wave,
His life did he devote and yield
To labour in his Saviour's field.
A faithful partner soon he won,
Whose course, alas! ere his was run;
Gladly he seized the ready claim
To take in place of his, her name;
Yet did he to us all impart
His lineage, and his life, and heart.
He knew my grandsire's change of thought
By thy fond care to knowledge brought,
Yet rather chose that thou shouldst deem
Of him as of an early dream,
Than from thy home, and Ellen's, tear
The wealth and honours he would share.
On pain of parent's direst curse,—
(Than every blight and evil worse,—)

Forbade us ever to disclose
The story of his early woes,
Or e'en in any wise pursue
The claims which were our own of due.
'But if' (upon his dying bed
'Twas thus to *me* he chiefly said)
' Ye should be privileged to win
To purer faith my long-lost kin;
And thou, by pure affection's chain,
Unknown, in Ellen's bosom reign,—
Then my best blessing on you light,
Then Heaven itself defend the right!'"

Kind reader, need I vainly dwell
On what thou canst conceive so well?
Quick vanished Walter to her side
With whom his fondest thoughts abide;—
"Lady," he said, "Sir Gilbert bade
I should impart a message sad;
The day at length is come,—the day
That bars within this Hall your stay;
Canst thou to bless my visions deign,
Or must I sigh and pine in vain?
Though blessed with but a scanty store,

Yet penury shall fly our door;
The waves of life I'll boldly breast
So I but with thy love be blessed.
Thy love shall be the spell and charm
To cheer my path and nerve my arm.
Not only change of earthly state,—
(The vain device of envious Fate,—)
But blessed be Heaven, those altered views
Which Rome and her deceits refuse,
Combine, thy sire and chiefly thee
To set from other trammels free."

The downcast look, the maiden blush
That decks her cheek with sudden flush,
Make answer to his hasty suit,
Though she was motionless and mute.

Unseen, Sir Gilbert now was nigh,
And watched the scene with clouded eye;
With faltering, yet impassioned prayer,
He blessed the still bewildered pair,
And fondly joined their trembling hands,—
Pledge of indissoluble bands:
"Ellen, this day to light hath brought

The mystery with such sorrow fraught;
See here my long-lost brother's son
Who hath his proper birthright won;
See here both thine and Ashton's lord,
See here untarnished truth's reward."

Ah! sure it were without avail
I further should prolong my tale;
Enough to say, the summer sun
His mid-way course had scarcely run
Ere, once again, the velvet sward
Was spread with many a festive board;
Again 'twas Ellen's natal day
That lent that hour its genial ray;
But now is Walter at her side
And proudly claims his hard-won bride.
Of maidens fair a goodly train
Their places in the church have ta'en,
In all the bloom of loveliness,
Such as both men and angels bless.
Ellen's is not the sole behest
Doth these with such a charge invest;
See Clara, too, in triumph led
By one who hath for Britain bled,

Where India's sun with deadly blow
Smites him that 'scaped an earthly foe,
And where Crimea's chilly blast
Saw many a hero breathe his last,—
The worthy pastor's eldest-born,
Early from sire and mother torn,
And now returned their hearts to cheer
And bring them joys for sorrow's tear.
Briefly it needs that I relate
Of Eustace Lyle the changeful fate;
At first it seemed like funeral knell
When told at Ashton what befell;
He sought, as refuge from his doom,
The monastery's living tomb;
But soon his Church's ebbing life
Recalled his active soul to strife,
And in the shadow-world of Rome
He found and finds congenial home.
Sir Gilbert, so we term him still,—
(Such Ellen's both and Walter's will)
Unchanged his home, delights to claim
From prattling lips a grandsire's name;
And long, oh! long, may funeral pall
Be sight unknown in Ashton Hall!

THE HOSPICE OF ST. BERNARD.

PROUDLY rejoicing in his finished course
Sets the vast orb, of light the mystic source ;—
See him all crimson, 'midst the emblazoned sky,
The puny skill of mimic art defy ;
E'en though some wizard hand should seem to mould
An isle of ruby in a sea of gold.
Calmly he sinks o'er Monte Rosa's height,
The lengthening prospect glows upon the sight ;
Fringed with the dying splendour of his rays
Each snow-clad summit greets the raptured gaze ;
Scarce have his golden honours 'gun to fade
On rushing stream or thundering cascade,
While yet the verdant richness of the vale
Lends of its fragrance to the passing gale.
All seems to mortal sense designed to show
One transient gleam of Paradise below.
So have we seen on life's beclouded way
In blissful trance some pure celestial ray ;—

Lo! from our dazzled eyes its brightness past
Too short to satiate, too divine to last!

Now, awful goddess of the sable wing,
Night o'er the world her shadow hastes to fling;
Soon the still sky her gloomy power shall feel
And all the horror of the tract reveal,
Where ridge to ridge succeeds, and rocks to rocks,
The unrecorded work of countless shocks,
Till sternly nursed on Desolation's breast,
The lonely Hospice rears its home of rest.
No stately wood, or sacred, classic grove,
Whose flower-enamelled paths invite to rove,
No purling stream is here, no babbling brook,
The wayward offspring of some favoured nook;
Their labours o'er, at e'en no shepherd's throng
In merry dance, or home-endearing song;
No lowing herds, at blush of early morn,
Follow the welcome sound of Alpine horn;
Of human voice is heard no fleeting trace
To mar the death-like stillness of the place.
In the lone cleft, unheeded, and in vain,
The marmotte only pipes her doleful strain;
Nor aught of life relieves the wearied eye

Within the limits of the boundless sky,
Save when the lawless hunter's venturous beat
May scare the chamois from his wild retreat;
Or, yet more reckless, Nature's store to reap,
Some child of science climb the pathless steep,
Where, as enthroned sole monarch of the spot,
The bouquetin culls his unpartaken lot,
Save, when perchance, first denizen of air,
The lammergeyer rests his pinions there;
Then soaring far from ken of human sight,
Rises triumphant to the realms of light.

But turn we now to yonder antique walls
Where with pale light the waning moonbeam falls,
No worldly pomp intruding to defile
The artless structure of their sacred pile.
Destined for aye a fearful war to wage
Against the elements' conflicting rage,
Its strength was sought but to defend the weak
Who with faint step its pious aid might seek;
No arms are there, no dread of war or foes,
Its only aim to soften human woes.
Nursed in the whirlwind, cradled in the storm,
Undaunted stands its unprotected form;

And, as by charm, unconscious all appears
Of the long flight of centuries of years;
For Time, consuming Time, whose ruthless hand
Changes proud cities to a heap of sand,
Seems with religious awe to keep aloof,
Child of the mountain! from thy kindly roof;
And, by his scythe while all beside is mown,
Hath but a modest grandeur round thee thrown.

Hark! is it Fancy's guile that prompts to hear
Those tones which sudden burst upon the ear?
No! 'tis the vesper bell, whose solemn sound
'Mid the lone rocks responsive notes hath found;
Devoutly cheerful, at its holy knell
Behold each inmate hastening from his cell;
And soon is raised, through the dark, silent air,
The mingled voice of thankfulness and prayer.
No pampered votaries here of worthless ease,
No sons of luxury the stranger sees;
No earth-born fame or honour here they sought,
By hired devotion, or by service bought;
But by religion's power and learning's page
First formed the saint, and added then the sage.
And now, with strength from Christian source supplied,—

Not from the shrine of philosophic pride,—
They sally forth with anxious step, yet slow,
To seek for wanderers 'mid these wilds of snow.
With lighted torch, which, gleaming from afar,
May to the way-worn prove a guiding star,
Like kindly genii of the place, they glide
Along the rugged mountain's steepy side.

Yet not alone to man belongs the praise
From dread despair his fellow-man to raise,
But here some secret spark of heavenly fire
Seems e'en the dumb creation to inspire.
Oft, when the avalanche's fateful sweep
Hath lulled some victim to a death-like sleep,
Their faithful dogs, unbidden, entrance gain
Where human aid had been bestowed in vain.
Yes! while St. Bernard's hospitable name
Shall be deciphered in the roll of Fame,
Thou in its annals, too, shall find a place,
Thou, Barri, noblest, gentlest of thy race,
Well may we deem, within thy patient breast
Reason did instinct with her power invest.

Over the unwritten history of the past,

Time, unopposed, oblivion's web hath cast;
But oh! should he remove the darkening veil,
And Memory, unforbidden, tell her tale,
How many a legend, fraught with deepest woe,
Would be revealed from 'neath the unchanging snow!
How much of long-accumulated lore
Would she produce from her untasted store,
That might the power of tragic song enhance,
Or add a terror to the wild romance!

Brighter the scene which, if to view unrolled,
St. Bernard's modest records would unfold;
They tell how from above 'twas given to save
Full many a wanderer from an early grave;
They tell how many a wayward, sinful soul
Hath here been guided to the heavenly goal.
For, though fell superstition's baneful power
Seems o'er thee like some cloud, blest Mount, to lour,
She cannot dim the beams of heavenly light,
Nor rob religion of her holy might.
Full many a child of misery, doomed to roam,
His path the mountain, the chill world his home,
A heart-sick wanderer, reckless with despair,
Without a tie to yield some soothing care,—

Unwilling rescued from the hand of Death,
When first he felt recalled the fleeting breath,—
Hath here been taught (of bliss unfailing store !)
To love the Saviour whom he spurned before.

In other guise, with other thoughts he came,
Whom kings and nations trembled but to name ;—
(Like him, who, famed of old in classic lore,
With swarthy myriads left the Punic shore,
And, yet untaught to pardon or to yield,
His vengeance wreaked on Cannæ's blood-stained field;—)
He, too, with victory glittering in his train,
Fought, to possess thee, on Marengo's plain,
Thee, Italy, alas ! how humbled now !
To tear each lingering laurel from thy brow,
With iron rule to lord it o'er thy soil,
And reap the produce of thy children's toil,
Destroy the traces Freedom still had left
In thy fair regions of her joys bereft,
With impious hand destroy the magic spell
That loves 'mid wrecks of fallen power to dwell,
And spoil thee of the lustre Art had flung
Thy temples and thy palaces among.

For this, St. Bernard, o'er thy drear expanse
Napoleon led the warlike flower of France,
E'en for destruction's pomp he forced a way
Where the lone hunter wont to track his prey,
Nor could the snow-decked precipice unseen,
The wavy glacier, fathomless ravine,
The beetling cliff, or proudly towering height,—
Whose cloud-capped summit seems to mock the sight,—
Move the undaunted chieftain from his post,
Or scare Ambition from that ardent host.
Onward their fainting steps he urged to gain
The long-wished view of fair Aosta's plain,
Where, haughty guardians of a servile land,
Their eagle-banner waved the Austrian band.

Yet e'en, stern conqueror, to thy marble heart
This scene some sweet emotion could impart,
E'en thou couldst love the fortitude divine
Of higher flight, from purer source than thine,
Which, far above all haunts by man possessed,
'Mid boundless wastes with snows eternal dressed,
Hath consecrated e'en the withered sod,
And reared a temple here to Mercy's God.
Thy legions, too, stood fixed in speechless awe,

As, all unmoved these holy men they saw,
And, while they prove their hospitable care,
From chastened hearts pour forth the secret prayer.

Let not the stranger, whose inquiring gaze
Loves the memorials of departed days,
Unheeding pass, Dessaix, thy lowly tomb,
Nor spare the tear at thine untimely doom.
Ah! little thought'st thou, 'mid the foremost first,
When, hurried on by glory's maddening thirst,
Thou sailed'st from conquered Egypt's burning strand
To meet thy chieftain in this Alpine land,
That a rich price thy life's blood soon should pay
For the sad triumph of Marengo's fray,
And, mouldering, soon, thy warrior ashes rest
In this lone chapel on the mountain's breast.

But vain though nature's barrier here might seem
To stem aggression's desolating stream;
And vainly though the Austrian arms withstood
The heady current of that rushing flood,
Which, as by spell, obsequious wont to wait
On him so long the favoured child of Fate;
Yet that Almighty Judge, whose ways to scan

May not belong to finite erring man,
Had known the widow's cry, the orphan's tear,
And set a limit to his dread career;
Sudden at length He brought the darkened hour
That saw him quail before Britannia's power.

Britain! for thee no threatening mountains rise
With iced-robed summits to the stormy skies;
Yet hath Philanthropy a temple found
In British hearts, and hallowed British ground,
Nor finds she o'er the world a fitter shrine,
A fairer home, O Ocean Queen, than thine.

BROTHERS OF THE LOOM.

Courage! brothers of the loom!
What, though toil your life-long doom,
Are not true men workers all
Till the Heavenly Master call,—
Workers all with head or hand,
Till run out our spell of sand,
Filling each his destined place,
Each to leave a living trace?

Faint not! brothers of the loom!
Flowers of life for him shall bloom,
Who with hand of nurture tends
What our Father's bounty sends.
Yours may be the joys of home,
Bright as under gilded dome—
Be intemperance kept aloof,
And love housed beneath the roof.

Fret not, brothers of the loom!
Give not place to thoughts of gloom;
He who reigns where sorrows cease,
Earnest gives of endless peace;
Faith can calm the waves of life,
Though with storm and tempest rife;
Hope, the anchor of the soul,
Can the gale-tossed ship control.

Rail not, brother of the loom!
In the world has each one room;
Envy not the rich and great,
Hurt not thee their rank and state.
Let not friend of man despond;
Strengthening daily is the bond,
Knits the manly, wise, and good,
In one human brotherhood.

Forward! brother of the loom!
Fruitful is of Time the womb,
And for thee, perchance, may bear
Well-earned prize, or guerdon rare;

Many a fair and world-wide name,
Deathless in the roll of fame,
Hath from lowest step begun,
And its way to greatness won.

Grieve not, brother of the loom!
Even though this side the tomb
Nought should seem to smile or cheer,
As revolves the weary year.
Lands there are beyond the grave
Where the Life-tree's branches wave,
If our Father, Saviour, Lord,
Find in us responsive chord.

TO F.

As, all in vain, on some strong tower
Both time and tempest try their power:
Their rage and envy but endue
Its sternness with a mellowed hue:
While in its clefts the wild rose springs,
Around in love the ivy clings:
And what the rude a ruin deem
Becomes the poet's favoured theme;—
So, 'gainst the fortress of our love
Both change and chance shall harmless prove,
And even to a richer tone
Soften those colours all its own,
While present thoughts with past combine
Fresh links, and ever fresh to twine.
The works of man, howe'er they brave
Time's current, and oblivion's wave,
Must yield at last. There is a day
When Earth itself shall pass away;
But whilst all else of Death shall taste,
Affection cannot die nor waste:
By God's own hand designed, arrayed,
e only flower that may not fade.

ODE TO FASHION.

"May ruin seize thee, ruthless king,
  Confusion on thy banners wait,"
And doom's delay but serve to bring
  A heavier fall, a sterner fate.

Their names are in the roll of fame
  That would not brook oppression's band,
But rallying strong in freedom's name,
  Of tyrants rid their Fatherland.

The world, too, cold and careless known,
  Admired the deeds it could not dare,
And reaping where it had not sown,
  Delighted still the fruit to share.

But thy fell power from age to age
  Our race in bondage vile hath laid,—
The courtly prince, the thoughtful sage,
  The high-born dame, the rustic maid.

And none arise to break the spell
  We all complain of and obey;
Thy wayward insolence to quell,
  And spoil thee of thy withering sway.

Yet say, ye skilled in history's lore,
  (Wisdom and truth's unfailing mine,)
Say, when was tyrant ever bore
  Such fitful senseless rule as thine?

What eastern despot's maddened brain
  Was ever of caprice so rife?
Oh! sure that judgment must be vain
  That's ever with itself at strife.

But nature's voice is aye the same,
  And ne'er shall change, decay, or die;
She can alone our homage claim
  Since she alone can time defy.

And 'tis on her unfettered course
  The Graces wont their flowers to throw;
O maidens! seek the only source
  From whence the streams of beauty flow.

For art, where'er she wend her way,
  Of right is nature's handmaid still;
Can only shine with borrowed ray,
  E'en though of might the heart to thrill.

The highest praise to her that's left
  Is, well to mark her heaven-taught guide;
Her rarest power, to veil the theft
  And from our gaze herself to hide.

SOLITUDE.

If walls do not a prison make,
  Nor iron bars a cage,
With all that tyrants do to slake
  Their vengeance and their rage;

But oft, when heaviest fetters wring
  The limbs, and all is night,—
The spirit brighter soars to wing
  Its heavenward, homeward flight;—

No more are palace halls a home,
  With all that wealth can show—
The tap'stried wall, and painted dome
  Where art and luxury glow;

Nor guests that court the master's smile
  And throng the festive board;
These all, despite their varied guile,
  No solace can afford;

E'en though thy happy power it be
  Attachment to command;
And though dependents be to thee
  No mercenary band.

Fair though thy lot to passing sight,
  Unshared, it is not bliss;
Nay, only marks with fatal light
  The withered heart's abyss.

When do we feel forlorn, alone,
  If not in busiest crowd?
Oh! when is solitude our own,
  If not 'mid revel loud?

And pomp and splendour do but mark
  The cold and cheerless hearth;
What should be joy conceals a shock—
  E'en blessings lose their worth.

If e'er oblivion's web should fence
  The sufferer from his woes,
'Tis but to yield that keener sense
  Awakening memory knows.

And though excitement's feverish power
  Should lend a transient gleam,
Yet when returns the lonely hour
  Its shadows darker seem.

Or if on life's beclouded way
  Some holier beam be cast;
No sooner seen the heavenly ray,
  Than lo! its brightness past.

But in the lowliest abode
  Of faithful hearts and true—
Should no consuming care corrode,
  We truest home may view.

Where like a flame, which purer glows
  The higher it ascends—
So time to heartfelt mutual vows
  Increasing freshness lends.

And each devoted bosom lives
  For other's sake alone;
Enriched the more, the more it gives,
  Deems other's good its own.

This brighest lot should Heaven deny,
  Or given, take away;
Be parent's hand or sister's by,
  In joy and sorrow's day!

But guide, Thou Source of Love and Peace,
  The hearts that seem unblessed,
To heavenly homes, where sorrows cease,
  And wearied souls shall rest.

BALLAD.

(FOUNDED ON FACT).

SAD, at flattering call of glory,
  Spared a sire his son;
(Such the child of sacred story—
  Rachel's youngest one;)

And the day that he departed
  In the far-bound ship,
Did the father, heavy-hearted,
  Plant a myrtle slip;

Myrtle—freedom's ancient token—
  Braided round the sword,
When Athenæ's bonds were broken,
  Spurned her tyrant lord.

Myrtle—emblem fit for weapon
  Worn by British hand;
But in virtue's cause may Briton
  Wield the lance or brand.

And with daily fondness tended
  Was this myrtle shoot;
From the blast and chill defended,
  Firmly struck its root—

And for years of absence seven,
  No mischance befell;
How the father praised high Heaven,
  Needs it that I tell?

But the Russian's lawless daring
  Lit of war the flame;
Autumn saw him scathless sharing
  Alma's well-earned fame.

And that myrtle still was living
  In its sheltered bower,
Richly to the watcher giving
  Fragrant leaf and flower.

Till, one morn, the leaves discerning
  On the topmost branch,
To a livid paleness turning,
  Made his cheek to blanch.

And next day those leaves were failing;
  So the mischief grows:
As in concord sad bewailing
  Our Crimean woes.

'Twas not superstitious feeling
  Made the father shrink;
'Twas a hidden chord, revealing
  Sympathetic link.

Flashed along the wires of magic
  Tidings sad, that day;
Tidings meet for poem tragic
  And heroic lay.

And among the direly wounded
  Was that gallant son;
To the father, cold it sounded
  That the fight was won;

For his heart was fondly yearning
  After visions fled;
Hair from grey to white was turning
  On that father's head.

From fresh morn to weary even
  All was dread and gloom;
In his heart by sorrow riven,
  Sounds the knell of doom.

But in mercy God was dealing
  With that stricken heart;
Oft the wound, when nearest healing,
  Yields the keener smart.

Days and weeks the son did hover
  Death betwixt and life,
Till, for life did youth recover
  Vantage in the strife.

Homeward o'er the billows drifted,
  Like a wasted wreck,
He by parent's arm was lifted
  From the dreary deck.

Long was vigour's tide returning,
  Long the ebb and flow;
He the while a lesson learning,
  Only sufferers know.

For affliction's golden teaching
  Had a victory won;
To eternal mansions reaching
  Is the way begun.

As the icy hand of danger
  Thrilled his outward frame;
Thoughts to which he was a stranger
  O'er his spirit came.

Heightened is the father's measure
  Of his bliss regained;
Who hath truly prized a treasure
  Till its brightness waned?

Vanished is the crushing burden
  Sunk him to the ground;
But his prayers the richest guerdon
  From above have found.

And the myrtle tree reviving
  Glowed with leaf and flower;
Growing day by day, and thriving
  In the sheltered bower.